DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 640 SP 040 481

AUTHOR Connor, Kathy R.; Killmer, Nadine
TITLE Elementary and Secondary Cooperating Teacher Effectiveness: Is There a Difference?
PUB DATE 2001-10-01
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, October 24-27, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperating Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Mentors; Preservice Teacher Education; Student Teacher Attitudes; Student Teachers; *Teacher Characteristics

ABSTRACT

This study examined the responses of elementary and secondary level student teachers and cooperating teachers to questions about characteristics of effective cooperative teachers. Data were collected over 2 years and analyzed separately for the elementary and secondary education levels. Overall, both groups of student teachers unanimously agreed that the four most important characteristics of effective cooperating teachers were providing helpful feedback and guidance, sharing files and ideas, allowing the freedom to try new things, and providing a positive and supportive environment. Elementary level student teachers mentioned feedback and sharing of files and ideas nearly twice as often as did secondary level student teachers. Both groups of student teachers also mentioned the importance of professional modeling and a caring attitude. Cooperating teachers consistently cited the same major characteristics as did the student teachers. These results suggest that there is substantial agreement on the four characteristics that effective cooperating teachers must possess. (Contains 27 references.) (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 461 640

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY COOPERATING TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS: IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

Kathy R. Connor

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Kathy R. Connor, Director of Student Teaching and
Coordinator of Project Opportunity
Iowa State University

Nadine Killmer, Assistant Director of Field Services
Iowa State University

Presented at Midwestern Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Chicago
October 2001

SP040421

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

Since cooperating teachers are essential to student teacher success, it is crucial for teacher preparation institutions to describe the qualities and characteristics of those chosen to be cooperating teachers. Part of the problem is the individuals (i.e. student teachers) who work most closely with cooperating teachers, and the cooperating teachers themselves, have rarely been asked to describe what makes an effective cooperating teacher. Data collected from student teachers, therefore, would be useful in defining the qualities, which indicate cooperating teacher effectiveness to them. Educators who serve as cooperating teachers also have valuable knowledge about what skills and practices work successfully in the student teaching relationship. The feedback from student teachers and cooperating teachers can greatly assist teacher preparation institutions in upgrading training programs for cooperating teachers. Collecting data from all levels, K-12, will additionally provide information that will allow the researchers to compare and contrast the effectiveness of cooperating teachers from both the elementary and secondary perspectives.

Although educators and teacher preparation institutions nationally acknowledge the need for overall reform (Goodlad, 1991: Holmes Group, 1991; Howey, 1996; U.S. Office, 1991), the role of the cooperating teacher as a mentor is the frequently overlooked link to successful student teaching programs. Researchers agree on the importance of the role of the cooperating teacher, but little information exists to provide a research base for the work of the cooperating teacher in teacher education preparation (Connor 1993). There is scant evidence available directly from cooperating teachers regarding their opinions related to successful teacher preparation (Veal & Rikard, 1998). Teacher preparation institutions need to heed the views of experienced cooperating teachers in order to make better decisions about educational reform in general and to provide more effective student teaching experiences for prospective teachers. Conversely, the voices of the student teachers themselves are also a key factor in improving the field experiences that provide the practical application resulting from their coursework.

Yamashita's (1990) study of cooperating teachers described the following findings:

1. cooperating teachers have a significant impact on the attitudes and teaching behaviors of student teachers.
2. college coordinators have little or no direct effect on the student teacher,
3. cooperating teacher selection is a neglected aspect of many teacher preparation programs, and
4. although there is agreement among teacher educators that cooperating teachers need special training, there is very little agreement about what the content of that special training should be.

Accordingly, teacher preparation institutions must provide a profile of the role of the cooperating teacher in their programs before successful cooperating teacher training programs can be designed or evaluation of participants can occur. This study scrutinizes the responses of student teachers and cooperating teachers who were queried about characteristics of effective cooperating teachers and describes how the responses may be

used to design future evaluation instruments for use with cooperating teachers. The responses from teacher education students (and their corresponding cooperating teachers) in both elementary and secondary placements who were surveyed are discussed with the intent to determine:

1. if the secondary levels focus on specific content, as contrasted with the more general curriculum of elementary schools, impacts the type of traits an effective cooperating teacher must possess.
2. if the differences of ages/developmental levels between elementary and secondary students impacts what effective cooperating teachers do, or
3. if the training and/or evaluation of cooperating teachers should vary depending upon their level.

Methods

The Student Program Evaluation Form was developed to be used at the completion of the student teaching semester with all students. Several of the questions refer to the capabilities of the cooperating teacher. Content analysis was derived specifically from question 2, "What are some of the things your cooperating teacher did that you valued an/or appreciated?" The survey form divides the semester into two eight-week sessions for all elementary students and for some of the secondary student teachers. Other secondary student teachers have one twelve-week session, depending upon their content area. Data collection has occurred regularly over a period of eight years (1994 – 2001) for elementary students and for four years (1998 – 2001) for secondary students. An open-ended format was utilized to avoid guiding responses and to elicit a genuine range of responses.

The feedback from 362 elementary student teachers and 104 secondary student teachers was tabulated and grouped into categories by frequency. Our population was quite homogeneous in that the majority of the student teachers surveyed were native to the mid-west and attended schools similar to those where they student taught. Sites ranged from urban to suburban and rural and most were located within 60 miles of the university.

The survey form, developed for use with cooperating teachers, contained four questions related to their perceptions of cooperating teacher effectiveness. Questions asked were:

1.What do you believe is the single most valuable thing an effective cooperating teacher can provide a student teacher?

2. What do you think student teachers would say cooperating teachers did that was most valued/appreciated by them?

3. What are some of the qualities you believe describe an effective cooperating teacher?

4, What do you think are the most valuable experiences you can provide a student teacher?

Feedback from 104 elementary cooperating teachers and 129 secondary cooperating teachers was collected, categorized and listed by frequency over a two-year period. As with the student teacher instrument, the cooperating teacher survey was designed to be open-ended to elicit a range of genuine responses. The participating cooperating teachers

were selected through a process that involved an application, selection by an administrator and an endorsement from the Office of Field Experiences. Over 95% of participants had worked with more than one student teacher.

After several semesters of data collection, the types and frequencies of responses from both student teachers and cooperating teachers were compared and contrasted. The goal was to discover how closely students and cooperating teachers agreed on what characteristics are most indicative of an effective mentor and to then determine if those characteristics are universal, or if there are differences related to grade level.

Student Teacher Results

The Student Teacher View Table, shown in Table 1, consolidates both the elementary and secondary student teacher responses by frequency and rounded percentage. The percentage is helpful in comparing the two student teacher levels, since there were more that three times as many elementary student teachers as secondary student teachers that participated in the survey. It is evident that both elementary and secondary student teachers believe the most valuable help from cooperating teachers comes in the form of:

1. helpful feedback/guidance,
2. the sharing of files/ideas/methods,
3. creating a supportive and positive environment, and
4. in providing the freedom to try new things.

Elementary student teachers cite helpful feedback and sharing of ideas/materials as top qualities of an effective cooperating teacher more than twice as often as did the secondary student teachers. The two levels of student teachers are closer in their agreement that a positive environment and the freedom to try new things are both important characteristics. Elementary student teachers mentioned professional treatment and being left alone in their classroom much more frequently than the secondary student teachers. Both groups seemed to feel that a professional model, who is understanding and caring, is also desirable. Two categories that were named more frequently by secondary than elementary student teachers referred to cooperating teachers who were open/flexible and coops that modeled several different techniques for them.

Cooperating Teacher Results

Table 2, The Cooperating Teacher Table, has four sections that correspond to the four survey questions asked. Section one shows responses to the question, "What do you believe is the single most valuable thing an effective cooperating teacher can provide a student teacher?" The most frequently cited responses by both secondary and elementary coop teachers were:

1. freedom to try new things,
2. sharing of files/ideas/methods,
3. provision of helpful feedback and guidance; and
4. creating a supportive/positive environment.

Being a professional model was also named by 10% of elementary coops, but by only 3 % of secondary cooperating teachers. Elementary and secondary coops agreed fairly closely on the supportive environment and freedom to try new things categories, whereas many more elementary coops named the sharing of ideas/materials category and conversely, more secondary coops mentioned the importance of helpful feedback. One category mentioned only by secondary cooperating teachers was providing a realistic experience.

In responding to question two, "What do you think student teachers would say cooperating teachers did that was most valued/appreciated by them?" The top responses were:

1. helpful feedback/guidance,
2. freedom to try new things, and
3. giving encouragement/support.

Elementary and secondary cooperating teachers were close on the numbers 2 and 3, but about twice as many elementary coops listed providing helpful feedback and guidance as an important quality for an effective cooperating teacher. Both levels of coops also agreed on creating a positive environment and giving discipline tips in similar numbers. More secondary coops felt professional modeling was important, whereas more elementary coops felt sharing of files and materials was important.

Question three, "What are some of the qualities you believe describe an effective cooperating teacher?" elicited ten categories that both elementary and secondary cooperating teacher felt were vital:

1. creating a positive/supportive environment,
2. flexibility,
3. patience/honesty,
4. being a professional model,
5. organizational skills,
6. freedom to try new things,
7. helpful feedback,
8. humor,
9. communication skills, and
10. enthusiasm.

Creating a supportive/positive environment and patience/honesty were the most agreed upon qualities cited by both the elementary and secondary coops. The levels of agreement on the other eight qualities included in the previous list varied some by teacher level, but were still considered by all as important. Being a professional model was mentioned almost twice as frequently by secondary coops. The freedom to try new things, flexibility, helpful feedback and sharing of ideas were mentioned more frequently by elementary cooperating teachers. Knowledge of content/theory category was mentioned in a similar frequency for both elementary and secondary coops.

The final question asked of the cooperating teachers was, "What do you think are the most valuable experiences you can provide a student teacher?" Two categories emerged as most frequently mentioned by both elementary and secondary coop teachers:

1. giving the freedom to try new things, and
2. the modeling of important skills/strategies.

Both groups of cooperating teachers also agreed on two additional categories, but in fewer numbers. (Sharing of ideas/files and creating a positive/supportive environment) There were two additional categories mentioned quite frequently by elementary coops, but at much lower levels by secondary coops. They were giving discipline tips and provision of helpful feedback.

Conclusions

Data collected from the student teachers were analyzed separately in terms of elementary majors and secondary majors, and likewise responses from elementary and secondary cooperating teachers were analyzed by comparing and contrasting the two levels of mentors. Lastly, student teacher and cooperating teacher data were viewed in a global manner to ascertain the levels of agreement or patterns that emerged.

The two levels of student teachers unanimously agreed upon the four most important characteristics that effective cooperating teachers must possess. Those were helpful feedback/guidance, sharing of files/ideas, the freedom to try new things and the provision of a positive/supportive environment.

Elementary student teachers mentioned feedback and sharing of file/ideas nearly twice as often as did the secondary, whereas the elementary and secondary student teachers were closer in frequency when naming positive environment and freedom to try new things as important traits. The two levels of student teachers also mentioned the importance of professional modeling and a caring attitude in similar numbers. Professional treatment and being left alone to run the classroom were characteristics mentioned more frequently by elementary students, and the traits of being open/flexible and modeling several techniques were mentioned more by secondary student teachers.

Analysis of student teacher responses shows overwhelmingly that there is more agreement than disagreement. Although the order of the top responses varied slightly, the same major responses were cited consistently. There were no obvious patterns that emerged from comparing the elementary and secondary results that would support the initial hypothesis that greater emphasis on content areas for the secondary or differences in the developmental needs of elementary and secondary pupils might have an impact on how student teachers would respond.

In terms of cooperating teacher responses on the four-question survey, again the four most mentioned characteristics named by student teachers were consistently cited by coop teachers. In question one, which asked what the single most valued trait a coop could possess, freedom to try new things, sharing of ideas/files, helpful feedback/guidance and the creative of a positive environment were the four most frequently mentioned. The first one was mentioned more by secondary coop teachers in questions one and two, but that response on questions three and four was similar for both

levels of coop teachers. Many more elementary coop teachers mentioned sharing files for questions one and three, but responses from the two levels on questions four were similar.

When cooperating teachers were asked what student teachers would say were the most valued characteristics of effective coops, the responses were similar. More elementary coops cited feedback, but in question one, more secondary coops mentioned feedback. On questions three and four, responses related to feedback were comparable for the two levels of cooperating teachers. Professional modeling had more secondary coop responses on questions two and three, but more elementary coops mentioned modeling in questions one. Question four showed that the two levels rated modeling about the same.

Responses to question three were more diverse, likely due to the fact that the query asked for many qualities, as opposed to the single most important quality asked for in question one. There were at least ten qualities mentioned by both levels of cooperating teachers as important. The top four characteristics that were identified by student teachers as the most important coop traits were included in the broadened list. Question four responses were less diverse, but again very similar in that the same four characteristics emerged as being significant.

Overall analysis of the combined student and cooperating teacher data suggests that there is substantial agreement that helpful feedback, sharing of techniques/materials, providing freedom to try new things and establishing a positive/supportive environment are the key characteristics that any effective cooperating teacher must possess. It becomes clear that both the elementary and secondary level coop teachers need to possess and/or develop these traits if they are to provide successful learning experiences for their assigned student teachers. These findings also become extremely important to university faculty members who design the orientation/training programs for new cooperating teacher induction and likewise, for providing effective, ongoing training of current coop teachers. Many states mandate the provision of yearly workshops for the purpose of improving cooperating teacher effectiveness and certainly encourage more frequent professional opportunities for mentor teachers. Additionally, in the future, there will likely be a call for more formal evaluation of educators who serve as cooperating teachers. For all of these needs mentioned, the results of this study should provide a base for more informed decision-making and for better focused efforts to improve the cooperating teacher's role in the evolution of stronger teacher preparation programs.

STUDENT TEACHER VIEW-Table 1

What are some of the things your cooperating teacher did which you valued and/or appreciated?

RESPONSES	Elementary N=362		Secondary N=104	
	Totals	Rounded %	Totals	Rounded %
Helpful feedback/guidance	275	76%	33	32%
Shared files/ideas/methods	189	52%	21	20%
Supportive/positive environment	174	48%	32	31%
Freedom to try new things	128	35%	34	33%
Professional treatment	57	16%	1	1%
Let me have classroom alone	53	15%	1	1%
Understanding/caring	52	14%	11	11%
A professional model	51	14%	8	8%
Let me start immediately	20	6%	2	2%
Taught me organization	15	4%	-	-
Open & flexible	11	3%	7	7%
Discipline tips	2	1%	2	2%
Assisted in job search	1	<1%	2	2%
Taught me content	1	<1%	1	1%
Gave duties gradually	1	<1%	-	-
Modeled several techniques	-	-	4	4%
Helped interpret standards	-	-	1	1%

COOPERATING TEACHER VIEW-Table 2

1. What do you believe is the single most valuable thing an effective cooperating teacher can provide a student teacher?

RESPONSES	Elementary N=104		Secondary N=129	
	Totals	Rounded %	Totals	Rounded %
Freedom to try new things	36	35%	57	44%
Shared files/ideas/methods	33	32%	17	13%
Helpful feedback/guidance	16	15%	47	36%
Supportive/positive environment	16	15%	16	12%
A professional model	10	10%	4	3%
Organization	2	2%	-	-
Flexibility	2	2%	-	-
Patience	1	1%	2	2%
Enthusiasm	1	1%	-	-
Facilitated self-evaluation	1	1%	-	-
Provided realistic experience	-	-	7	5%

2. What do you think student teachers would say cooperating teachers did that was most valued/appreciated by them?

RESPONSES	Elementary N=104		Secondary N=129	
	Totals	Rounded %	Totals	Rounded %
Helpful feedback/guidance	68	65%	44	33%
Freedom to try new things	27	26%	41	32%
Encouragement/support	17	16%	23	18%
Created a positive environment	10	10%	14	11%
Discipline tips	10	10%	11	9%
Shared ideas/files/methods	9	9%	4	3%
Professional modeling	3	3%	12	9%
Humor/flexibility	1	1%	-	-
Facilitated self-reflection	1	1%	-	-

3. What are some of the qualities you believe describe an effective cooperating teacher?

RESPONSES	Elementary N=104		Secondary N=129	
	Totals	Rounded %	Totals	Rounded %
Supportive/positive environment	55	53%	71	55%
Flexibility	40	38%	19	15%
Freedom to try new things	30	29%	15	12%
Helpful feedback	27	26%	14	11%
Shared ideas/files/methods	22	21%	14	11%
Patience/honesty	20	19%	24	19%
Organization	19	18%	15	12%
Professional model	18	17%	39	30%
Humor	14	13%	11	9%
Communication skills	11	11%	9	7%
Enthusiasm	3	3%	14	11%
Knows content/theory	2	2%	4	3%
Confidence	1	1%	-	-

4. What do you think are the most valuable experiences you can provide a student teacher?

RESPONSES	Elementary N=104		Secondary N=129	
	Totals	Rounded %	Totals	Rounded %
Freedom to try new things	73	60%	65	50%
Models skills/strategies	34	35%	17	13%
Discipline tips	26	27%	9	7%
Helpful feedback	22	22%	9	7%
Shared lessons/files/ideas	9	9%	10	8%
Supportive/positive environment	8	8%	12	9%
Assessment ideas	5	5%	-	-
Conferencing skills	3	3%	-	-
Reflection techniques	3	3%	-	-
Flexibility	2	2%	-	-
Goal setting	2	2%	-	-
Gave varied experiences	-	-	2	2%

References

Alper, S., & Petish, P. (1972). A comparative study on the effects of student teaching on the attitudes of students in special education, elementary and secondary education. The Training School Bulletin, 69(2), 70-77.

Bradley, A. (1991). While all agree on value of field experience, many say clinical training should be redesigned. Education Week, 3(13), 1-23.

Connor, K., Killmer, N., McKay, J. & Whigham, M. (1993). Cooperating teacher effectiveness and training: Two views. Action in Teacher Education, 15(2), 72-78.

Connor, K., & Killmer, N. (1991). I.S.U. Elementary Student Teaching Handbook. Ames: Iowa State University.

Cruickshank, D., & Kennedy, J. (1977). The role of significant others during the student teaching experience. Journal of Teacher Education, 28, 51-55.

Dispoto, R. (1980). Affective changes associated with student teaching. College Student Journal, 14(2), 190-194.

Garland, C., & Shippy, V. (1991). Improving the student teaching context: A research-based program for cooperating teachers. Journal of Association of Teacher Educators, 13(1), 37-41.

Goodlad, J. (1990). Teachers for our nation's schools. San Francisco, Jossey Bass.

Goodman, J. (1985). What students learn from early field experiences: A case study and critical analysis. Journal of Teacher Education, 36(6), 42-48.

Guyton, E. (1989). Guidelines for developing educational programs for cooperating teachers. Journal of Association of Teacher Educators, 11(3), 54-57.

Guyton, E., & McIntyre, J. D. (1990). Student teaching and school experience. W. R. Houston, M. Haverman, & J. Sikula (Eds.), Handbooks of Research on Teacher Education. New York: Macmillan.

Hauwiller, J., Abel, F., Ausel, D. & Sparapani, E. (1988-89). Enhancing the effectiveness of cooperating teachers. Journal of Association of Teacher Educators, 10(4), 42-46.

Holmes Group, (1990). Tomorrow's schools: Principles for the design of professional Development schools. East Lansing, MI: author.

Holmes Group, (1996). Tomorrow's schools of education. East Lansing, MI: author.

Howey, K. (1996). Designing coherent and effective teacher education programs. In

J. Sikula (Ed.), Handbook of research in teacher education. (2nd Ed., pp. 143-170). New York, Macmillan.

Karmos, A. H., & Jacko, C. M. (1977). The role of significant others during the student teaching experience. Journal of Teacher Education, 28(5), 51-55.

Piland, D. & Anglin, J. (1993). It is only a stage they are going through: The development of student teachers. Action in Teacher Education, 15(3), 19-26.

Portman, Penelope, (1993). Barriers to change in teacher education. Action in Teacher Education, 15(1), 14-19

Richardson-Koehler, V. (1988). Barriers to the effective supervision of student teaching: A field study. Journal of Teacher Education, 39(28), 34.

Shippy, V.S. (1989). An investigation of role expectations in the student teaching triad as viewed by student teachers, cooperating teachers and college supervisors. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Albany.

Stanulis, R. (1995). Action research as a way of learning about teaching in a mentor/student teacher relationship. Action in Teacher Education, 16(4), 14-24.

Veal, M.L., & Rikard, L. (1998). Cooperating teachers' perspectives on the student teaching triad. Journal of Teacher Education, 49, 108 – 119.

Vogt, M. (1988). The preservice teacher-cooperating teacher relationship: An historical perspective. Paper presented at the International Reading Association, Toronto, Canada, May, 1988.

Wigle, Stanley E., & Dudley, Richard E. (1993). The integrated methods model and secondary preservice teacher education programs. Action in Teacher Education, 15(1), 52-55.

Yamashita, S. (1991). Student teacher assessment of cooperating teacher supervision. Paper presented at the American Association of Teacher Educators, New Orleans, February, 1991.

Zeichner, K. M. (1983) . Alternative paradigms of teacher education. Journal of Teacher Education, 34 (3), 3-9.